Sunday, November 27, 2016

Advent 1 Year A

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Preparing Together

Today marks the beginning of Advent, the season where we prepare for new life.  For my mom, sister, many friends, and I, this whole year has been a time of preparation.  Back in January, (the popular video streaming website) Netflix announced that they would be filming a revival to *Gilmore Girls,* a favorite television show from my teenage years.  TV show revivals have become common over the last few years and some say that “it’s because the storylines these days are nothing like they used to be,” but for *Gilmore Girls*, it was something more.

The show follows the lives of a young single mother, Lorelai Gilmore, and her teenage daughter, Rory, who was born when Lorelai was sixteen years old.  They live in Connecticut in a small town called Stars Hollow, filled with charming and eclectic characters such as Luke, the grumpy, yet loving owner of the local diner; Ms. Patty, a former Broadway actress, who runs a dance school out of the barn in the center of the town; and Taylor, the town mayor and owner of several local businesses who is a stickler for town rules. Due to the size of the town, everyone knows each other intimately and is deeply invested in the life of the town, as well as in the lives of Rory and Lorelai.

After months of sharing articles speculating what might happen in the revival of this show, on Friday afternoon my mom, sister, and I sat down to watch the first part of the revival. It was nostalgic in many ways, bringing back memories of Tuesday nights in high school sitting on the same couch watching the show, but it was not what I expected. Something was different. Perhaps it was that I had grown up; perhaps it was that the characters had grown up, or even that the writers were trying to make it relevant to today. Despite all the preparation and reading and excitement, the revival was not what I expected, yet it could never take away the meaning of the show in my life.

I originally met these characters in the end of middle school and returned to them again and again in High School, College, and beyond meeting them differently as I grew up and my lens changed.  Every time I re-watched the series, I was struck by the deep feeling of community.  There was the community built by sharing the story of these characters with friends and family each time I watched the show and there was also the community of Stars Hollow that formed and shaped Lorelai and Rory as they faced moments of heartbreak, challenge, joy, and celebration.  These characters were broken and flawed in many ways, yet held and loved by those around them.

In Isaiah, we heard of the Lord’s house, the mountains, the hills, the house of Jacob, and Jerusalem.  In psalm 122, we heard of the house of the Lord, Jerusalem and its gates, the thrones of the house of David, and the walls and towers.  And in our gospel for today, we heard of the ark and the field.  Each of these places is sacred and has significance to the writers of the biblical passages.  Not only is the space sacred, but the way that we approach the text allows us into the story and into communion with God in all spaces.

Our readings from Paul’s Letter to the Romans and the Gospel of Matthew ask us to prepare for the unknown.  *Something is coming.*  And as Fr. Eric preached two weeks ago, *Do not fear*.  Jesus does not want us to be scared of being left behind in his gospel, but rather invites us into a posture of change and transformation.  While the story of Jesus’ life is one we have heard before, we cannot completely know how we will meet it this year and how it will form us individually and as a community.

With the beginning of this new church year, our community follows the Rite I Liturgy, which definitely takes some initial adjustment for some and might feel natural for others.  No matter where you are, I invite you to notice how you are meeting this liturgy and how this liturgy is meeting you.  In his book, *Imagining the Kingdom*, James Smith writes of liturgy saying that, “*Form matters*- not because of any traditionalism or conservative preservation of the status quo, but precisely because there is a logic to a practice that is unarticulated but nonetheless has a coherent “sense” about it. Form matters because it is the form of worship that tells the Story (or better, *enacts* the Story).”[[1]](#footnote-1) During the rest of the service today and throughout advent, notice the language we use and how it has been used by many people before us, notice the prayers and the confession. Notice the embrace of community as we pass the peace and offer our gifts to this church at the offertory. Notice the way that Fr. Eric joins us to face God at the altar as he takes, blesses, breaks, and gives the body of Christ to us. Finally notice how we lift our voices collectively in song, creating something beautiful together.

A group of members from the congregation spent six weeks this Fall discussing how the Eucharist shapes us and prepares us to live a sacramental life in the world. Advent is an excellent opportunity to visit or revisit this idea. How can we take our formation in this church and bring it out into the world? It is also important to realize that liturgies outside the walls of the church, which James Smith refers to as “secular liturgies,” are forming us as well. The books we read, the tv shows we watch, our work and school communities, our families, and the stores where we shop are all different liturgies that form our orientation to the world. How are these liturgies, people, and places preparing *us* for what’s to come?

In this season, preparation comes naturally for many with the to-do lists, card-writing, shopping, decoration, cooking, and holiday gatherings. Each of these tasks are important to our traditions and connections, yet we must also keep the gospel in mind as we approach them. Jesus says, “ Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.” We can prepare and prepare and prepare ourselves, but we also must be able to pause to *let God prepare us.* We do not know *how* God will work through us this year, but we know that *he will* and we can stay awake to being transformed through this community and the other communities that we are a part of. As Paul said in his letter to the Romans, we can put on the garment of Christ.

A musician friend recently told me, “Singing together is one of the most counter-cultural things we can do. Think about it- two voices existing in the same space creating something larger than themselves together.” This is an excellent starting point for our preparation. Think about the space where Jesus will be born in a few weeks.  Think about the angels, shepherds, wise men, and animals across power, socio-economic class, and divinity, coming from different areas all for one common purpose: *to gather and celebrate the birth of Jesus.*

As we prepare for change in our local and broader community with three new babies on the way, leadership transitions in our country, and many things unknown, it is important to remember that we have each other to learn and grow from. So this advent, I challenge you to enter into sacred spaces with people who hold different perspectives. Walk onto the ark together, work in the field together, grind meal together, sing together and listen for God speaking through your neighbor. Remember that we all share the story that’s coming this Christmas. *Amen.*

1. Smith, James K. A. *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works,* 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)